



Natomas Oral Histories

2015/027

Oral interview of

Paul Shimada

while touring his family's home,
the Azevedo House,
at 1911 Bannon Creek Drive,
Sacramento, California

August 14, 1997

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This is not a verbatim transcript. Parts of the interview have been paraphrased.

Anne: So here we are. I am just walking into the front door. Paul is welcoming me. I'm exclaiming over the beautiful wood floors.

Paul: The wood floor is all the original oak wood. The corners have stars in them. The stars have natural wood in them.

Anne: It's a pattern with darker and lighter shades of wood making this star pattern.

Paul: Right, right.

Anne: Beautiful.

Paul: The rooms were all large because I guess in those days families were big.

Anne: Right. So, we've walked into a living room, which is attached to a large dining room.

Paul: Then there is a bedroom over here.

Anne: So then off to the left of the main entryway is a door leading to a bedroom, a large bedroom. Paul, how tall would you say these ceilings are? Are these nine feet?

Paul: I think so.

Anne: It looks about nine feet.

Paul: You're about six feet tall?

Anne: I am.

Paul: It's almost ten foot then.

Anne: Ok. Wow, and look. A big window in the front, and then two windows on the (west) side in this room. A closet.

[00:01:55]

Paul: This big bed here was specially made for my brother's wife and an interesting story about the wife is, she was the secretary for the California Farm Bureau.

Anne: Oh, really.

Paul: She was saying that she wanted to marry a virgin man. So I said, "I know one." She wanted to know right away who that person was. I said, "That's my brother." So she came over and met him and they married.

Anne: Oh, just like that. She knew what she wanted.

Paul: Within a year, she passed away. She got cancer.

Anne: Oh, sorry to hear that.

Paul: So he kept this room like the original.

Anne: It looks like a water bed. It's built up high.

Paul: Yes, it's a water bed. Then over here in the hallway—

Anne: So we're now going out.

Paul: This is a storage closet. I've got all kinds of stuff in there. I have to go through it. I haven't even touched it yet.

Anne: Ok, so the right-hand door in the bedroom led out into a hallway. Paul just showed me a storage room that's on the left-hand side, and then there is a large kind of alcove with a door in it.

Paul: That door goes back into the living room.

Anne: Then there is another door that leads into the dining room off this hallway on the right.

Paul: Here is a small restroom.

Anne: A restroom, the second doorway coming up this hallway on the left. It is all tiled, the walls and the floor, partially up. Beautiful, and a shower. Then another door leading off this hallway on the left here and then a staircase going upward

[00:03:55]

Paul: Then do you see these three Frigidaires? They've all been turned off. The wife used to entertain a lot, so we've now turned them all off and defrosted them.

Anne: Sure. Now, Paul, this was your brother's house. He lived here most recently and his name was Chuck, and his wife, what was her name?

Paul: Florine.

Anne: Florine. Ok. This hall is so huge. He has three refrigerators because she used to entertain so much, in this hallway, and there is still room to walk. Ok, now we're back in the dining room.

Paul: In the dining room, this is the original dining table.

Anne: The dining room has this door that leads off it onto the patio — is that right — the porch, the front porch there.

Paul: Yes, this leads off there.

Anne: Ok, kind of like French doors leading off.

Paul: I have a board here propped up. They tried to get in one time. They broke the glass, reached in, and opened the door. So now I have to have it blocked here so they can't reach in.

Anne: Beautiful, yes.

Paul: You can see there are stars in every corner.

Anne: Ok, now, I'd like to take a picture of this star right here so we can see what you're talking about. Let me see whether I have enough light with this little camera here. We'll see what I can capture, but what I was noticing — some of the stars. Let me get a picture of this one over here in the middle of the floor. It is designed a little differently. Still, that wood pattern, so beautiful. All right. Thank you.

Paul: Then, as she entertains a lot, you can see what she would use.

Anne: Look at those. Big, beautiful pots. Kind of like old fondue pots, but they're huge. Beautiful.

[00:06:21]

Paul: There used to be a fireplace here.

Anne: Oh.

Paul: When we moved the house, they had to take the fireplace out.

Anne: Oh, yes.

Paul: I never put it back in. I just sealed it over.

Anne: Yes. So, that's what I'm looking at now as I'm walking toward the north. I came through the front door, the living room, and came to the dining room, and there is a whole built-in hutch kind of thing (to the east of the wall where the fireplace used to be) with a mirror, drawers, a place to display candles and various kinds of things built right into the dining room here. Now we are going straight into the swinging door — oh, that's beautiful.

Paul: This is a picture of a barn made out of wood. The barn is very similar to the barn which actually existed a block down the street.

Anne: Very nice. What a beautiful job, and the wood — I love wood. Oh, is that gorgeous.

Paul: I donated the barn to the city.

Anne: Oh.

Paul: The city took a portion of the roof off with a see-through screen so they would not have to use electricity.

Anne: For more natural lighting. So this wall that Paul was talking about earlier that I'm passing now is where there used to be a fireplace, but it had to be taken out when they moved the house off Azevedo to this Bannon Creek location. So, all right, in the kitchen. Oh, what a big, huge kitchen again.

[00:08:02]

Paul: Here is the Frigidaire that we use.

Anne: Ok.

Paul: This Frigidaire has storage here, and then on this side they have space to keep things and keep them frozen.

Anne: Ok. A huge 22 Kenmore in the kitchen with the freezer side and the regular refrigerator side. Then there's kind of a built-in section in the middle of the room here just off to my right that has cupboards, it has a stove, an area for the stove to be in. It looks like the space was designed for one of those big old-fashioned stoves they used to have. I've seen one of those big things.

Paul: Yes. There's a small dining table here.

Anne: Oh, sure. So there's some more built-in cupboards on that wall behind this counter space that's sticking out here and divides the room between a less formal eating area and the stove, the cooking area. Then three more windows on the right-hand side here (east) and three more windows at the back of the house, the north side, and then the whole north side here in the kitchen is all built-ins. Beautiful glass cupboards and the counters with kind of a soft yellow with a pale blue trim. Beautiful tile work. It just looks wonderful yet. All built-in cupboards and drawers underneath that. There's a couple of doors here on the left-hand side. What is the first one that we passed here?

Paul: This goes back into the hallway.

Anne: Oh, sure enough. Ok, now I'm on the other side of those three big refrigerators.

Paul: Another bedroom here.

Anne: All right, another bedroom straight on.

Paul: I use it for storage.

Anne: Used for storage now, with four windows in it. With those high ceilings still.

Paul: This door here used to go downstairs to a basement. I put the heater in here and a few odds and ends.

Anne: So the other site had a basement.

Paul: It had a basement the whole length under the floor here.

Anne: Ok.

Paul: In those old days, they used to feed all the farmhands in the house here, in the basement. So they had a full kitchenette downstairs.

Anne: Oh. Then when you moved the home, you had to get rid of all that because this does not have that. It is a single — there's no basement on this site now.

Paul: Right. We didn't need it.

Anne: That's right.

[00:11:00]

Paul: When they moved the entire house, they had timbers two feet deep about a foot and a half wide and they went the full length of the house.

Anne: My, huge.

Paul: There was four of them, in pairs, two and two, and they sit on four-wheel dollies, eight sets of dollies. When they moved the house, nothing cracked.

Anne: Oh. What a beautifully built home.

Paul: They set it down in the wrong spot.

Anne: Oh, no.

Paul: See, we own two lots here, and they set it down on the second lot, where it was not supposed to be. I was in Washington, D.C. I had to come home here to show them where it was supposed to go. When they moved it over, the only thing that cracked was the front porch. I'll show you where the crack is later.

Anne: Incredible, incredible. Paul, what's this door?

Paul: Oh, yes. This is to the basement.

Anne: This is what I meant. Is that for the old phone? My parents used to have that. Or is it a clothes chute? Maybe it's a clothes chute. My parents used to have something that you would put clothes in and it would carry all the way downstairs.

Paul: Yes, you see they would have to go downstairs and drop it down.

Anne: Isn't that great! I love these old features. Ok, so a door there, too, it looks like that you've blocked off for now.

Paul: I don't know what you would call this. We have the original stove we used to use and the original wash machine. I haven't gotten rid of it.

Anne: Look at this. Now, my mom, I think, would call this a service porch. Where they used to have to take off their boots and hang up their coats and things before they could go into the rest of the house.

Paul: Yes, you can see the old raincoat hanging there.

Anne: Yes, an old yellow slicker.

Paul: And then of course this goes outside.

[00:13:23]

Anne: Ok, so now we have a door leading to the back porch here. So we're going out. It's screened in. It was a screened-in porch, this first little room we were in before going outside here.

Paul: Half-blind dog out there.

Anne: Oh, look there's the little pooch.

Paul: My brother's pet poodle. I have a lady who wants to adopt it.

Anne: Oh, how nice.

Paul: But she's sick right now, in the hospital. She won't be out for a month. So I'll just keep it here for a while. See the white cat?

Anne: I do.

Paul: All the neighborhood cats come here to eat.

Anne: Oh, they do?

Paul: The — I call her the cat lady. She feeds all the cats over here at the city park. She brings bags of food like this free. See this bag here? So I give her a donation every once in a while.

Anne: That's nice.

Paul: Help offset.

Anne: So what is this big building off to the side called?

Paul: Originally, well, the old-timers would call it a tank house.

Anne: All right.

Paul: It used to be one story higher. It held a 2500 gallon water tank up there.

Anne: Oh really.

Paul: There used to be a windmill on the other side. The windmill would pump the water into the tank. When the tank filled up, there was a spill pipe that came outside, so whenever the water came spilling out, you would go out there and shut the windmill down.

Anne: Oh.

Paul: So I use it for a storage house now.

Anne: Yes. Such an interesting — it looks so well built. Just so strong.

Paul: It's strong, but due to age, now the foundation has drawn moisture and it's spreading out. So, I have jacks in there to hold it up inside. A lot of restoration work has to be done now.

Anne: So, I noticed that there are two garage doors on the front, is that original?

Paul: It was used as a two-stall garage.

Anne: So, the lower part was used as a garage. Interesting. So, on the original site over there on Azevedo, there was the big barn like you were showing me in the wooden picture, this tank house, and then this structure.

Paul: Yes.

[00:16:21]

Anne: So when did you move to this site, these two structures?

Paul: We moved it in about 1948.

Anne: You moved from the Azevedo site to the Bannon Creek site in '48.

Paul: The dog that you hear barking hears my voice and now he wants to come in the house.

Anne: Oh, yes.

Paul: As long as his chain is not tangled up, I'll leave him out there.

Anne: Right, well it's such a gorgeous day today. 80 degrees on August 14 — it's almost unheard of in Sacramento. What a cute little pup.

Paul: He can't see you right now. His eye is kind of greenish.

Anne: On that left eye — no, the right eye. I noticed that one eye is discolored.

Paul: One looks more green than the other.

Anne: You can see a pupil in the other one, but the other one is covered over like it has glaucoma or like it has a skin over the top of it.

Paul: So, when I bring him in the house, he's happy as heck.

Anne: Yes, I'll bet. How cute. Well, he's got a good spot out there. What a beautiful place. Now, the upper floor has — I saw the stairway leading—

Paul: To two large bedrooms, the equivalent of four of today's.

Anne: Oh, my. Now is the upper story the same size as this level?

Paul: Yes.

Anne: So, the upstairs has been developed into two large rooms. Well, we're going to be able to take a look here, great. I so appreciate you letting us come in. Well, what's this "us"? Me.

Paul: Go ahead.

Anne: Ok, here I go. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen steps. This brings me up into this little area with built-in bookcases, three more windows, and the staircase had this wonderful wooden bannister up on both sides. So, off to my right now is a large bedroom with two closets, or two doors at least into it. It has seven windows, in it with three on the east side and four on the north. Oh, it's nice and light and bright.

[00:19:05]

Paul: This is a clothes closet here and this door goes into the next bedroom.

Anne: Oh, it does.

Paul: You can go round and round in here.

Anne: It looks like you can.

Anne: Now we've gone into another bedroom. This one has three windows (on the east side), and then a small extra window on the south side. Then the doorway leading from the bedroom we were just in. Then another little tiny—

Paul: That goes into the attic.

Anne: Ok, a door leading to the attic.

Paul: One day, I come here and I couldn't find my brother. I looked all over, so I opened the attic door and looked in, and there he was sleeping in between the rafters.

Anne: This was your older brother Chuck?

Paul: The younger brother. The senile brother.

Anne: Chuck is the younger brother?

Paul: Yes, he's seven years younger.

Anne: Oh, ok.

Paul: When I found him, I asked him why he was in there, and he said he was sleeping in his bedroom.

Anne: Well, in a way he was in the bedroom, just an added room off his bedroom.

Paul: Yes, sleeping in the attic. On top of the insulation.

[00:20:33]

Anne: Now, is the attic the whole length of the front of the house?

Paul: Yes. Here, let me open this and you can see it.

Anne: Oh my, look at that. Yes. So all the insulation between the rafters stretched out to the front.

Paul: He was sleeping right in there.

Anne: That's funny.

Paul: So I put all this stuff here so he couldn't go in there. When I found out he was doing all that, I moved him out of here.

Anne: Yes. And then we have another door here.

Paul: This is the bathroom. Everything all as it was.

Anne: Oh, look at this. So, this one has the built-in tub without a shower, unless you were to run one and put in a shower curtain as they do sometimes nowadays.

Paul: Yes.

Anne: And then it's got two little windows leading to the south with screens on them. They can be opened up the old fashioned way, with the latches, bringing the glass door swinging out so that the screen window is in place. Beautiful tile with decoration around it, trim, an edge. Then a little medicine cabinet, built in the wall with a mirror. Oh, how nice. And a window leading toward the west. Beautiful, very nice. I want to get some pictures if I may, and I want to get a sense from you which things you would be ok with me taking a picture of.

Paul: Sure.

[00:22:27]

Anne: Paul is bringing me back into this bedroom at the top of the stairs and showing me a photo, which he says is his mother.

Paul: The family was religious, so this is a small Buddhist—

Anne: Kind of a shrine?

Paul: Shrine. Candles in front—

Anne: So, this is a little wooden ornate box on which the picture rests on top of a piece of linen, perhaps, cloth. Then, inside is a little Buddha made out of what looks like brass, with all these little brass

bowls potentially to put incense or some little gift, and then the candles in the front, and then flowers in the front of that — to honor her. What was her name, Paul?

Paul: T-a-m-e. [*Pronounced Tah-May*]

Anne: Was she here in the United States?

Paul: Yes.

Anne: Was she here in Natomas?

Paul: No.

Anne: Not in Natomas.

Paul: She passed away in Minneapolis. See, I used to be stationed in the military intelligence, spoke Japanese quite a bit. This kept us intact.

Anne: That's beautiful. Those family things are really important, I feel.

Paul: One time I was in Japan talking to a group of people and they asked where my parents originally came from. I told them south in the Kumamoto prefecture

Anne: Oh.

Paul: They said I don't speak like someone from that prefecture. They would speak slang, hard language. I spoke intelligent, as if I was from a more intelligent group.

Anne: So, now ,your mother had how many children?

Paul: I think there were five. I don't recall now. They have all passed away now.

Anne: You're the only surviving son of Tame.

Paul: And my brother.

Anne: That's right, besides Chuck. Well, we'll see how this picture turned out. Paul, I wonder if you can tell me anything at all about this actual house. When it was on its original site, were you connected with it?

[00:25:41]

Paul: This house was built, as I recall, in 1924. It belonged to the Azevedo family and the street running north and south is named for him. Later he moved to south Sacramento, where he opened a haberdashery store. He passed away a long time ago now.

Anne: And then your family purchased the house from the Azevedos?

Paul: Yes. What happened was, when Bannon Creek Park was developed, the city said if I moved the house, I could have it for one dollar. I paid them the one dollar and I had the house moved to this present 1911 Bannon Creek Drive. When they moved the house, they moved the house on the lot that was not the right place, closer to Bannon Creek. I was in Washington, D.C., working as an agricultural assistant to Senator Hiyakawa. I had to come back to show them where to move the house back to where it should have been. The only thing that cracked on the house was the front porch floor, which was made of marble. After that, I purchased a small mobile home on Stadium Park on El Centro Road, and that's where I live now.

[00:28:00]

Anne: Yes. Now, help me with — the Azevedo's moved out and went down south, and then your family moved in here?

Paul: No, my family lived in this house when it was on the original site which is two blocks—

Anne: To the south of here—

Paul: To the south of this, its present location.

Anne: Ok, so you lived in it there. Now, who all of your family lived there when it was on its original site?

Paul: My wife, myself, and my brother.

Anne: So, then when you moved it over here, then you got your trailer—

Paul: We bought our mobile home in Stadium Park Estates. We did it at that time because my brother was getting married and we wanted them to have the house to themselves.

Anne: Sure.

Paul: Shortly thereafter, his wife Florine passed away because of cancer.

Anne: Oh. So, then, Chuck stayed in this house until, in the last couple of years, until he was unable to care for himself anymore.

Paul: He became senile, so he had to be closely watched. He would go out of the house and wander around.

Anne: That's dangerous. Right. Right. Thank you. [*Recording stops and restarts*] I was just asking Paul if he had an awareness of the size of this building, this home, and you were saying—

Paul: I took a measure, and it was 3,580 square feet.

Anne: 3,580 square feet. Thank you very much Paul.